



TO SHOOT OR BLUFF?

Synopsis.—Warned by his physician that he has not more than six months to live, Dan Failing sits dependently on a park bench, wondering where he should spend those six months. Memories of his grandfather and a deep love for all things of the wild help him in reaching a decision. In a large southern Oregon city he meets people who had known and loved his grandfather, a famous frontiersman. He makes his home with Silas Lennox, a typical westerner. The only other members of the household are Lennox's son, "Bill," and daughter, "Snowbird." Their abode is in the Umpqua divide, and there Failing plans to live out the short span of life which he has been told is his. From the first Failing's health shows a marked improvement, and in the companionship of Lennox and his son and daughter he fits into the woods life as if he had been born to it. By quick thinking and a remarkable display of "nerve" he saves Lennox's life and his own when they are attacked by a mad coyote. Lennox declares he is a reincarnation of his grandfather, Dan Failing I, whose fame as a woodsman is a household word. Dan learns that an organized band of outlaws, of which Bert Cranston is the leader, is setting forest fires. Landry Hildreth, a former member of the gang, has been induced to turn state's evidence. Cranston shoots Hildreth and leaves him for dead. Whisperfoot, the mountain lion, springs on Hildreth and finishes him.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

And as for Whisperfoot—the terror that choked his heart with blood began to wear off in a little while. The man lay so still in the thickets. Besides, there was a strange, wild smell in the air. Whisperfoot's stroke had gone home so true there had not even been a fight. The darkness began to lift around him, and a strange exultation, a rapture unknown before in all his hunting, began to creep into his wild blood. Then, as a shadow steals, he went creeping back to his den.

Dan Failing had been studying nature on the high ridges; and he went home by a back trail that led to old Bald mountain. The trail was just a narrow serpent in the brush; and it had not been made by gangs of laborers, working with shovels and picks. Possibly half a dozen white men, in all, had ever walked along it. It was just the path of the wild creatures, worn down by hoof and paw and cushion since the young days of the world.

It was a roundabout trail home, but yet it had its advantages. It took him within two miles of Snowbird's lookout station, and at this hour of day he had been particularly fortunate in finding her at a certain spring on the mountain side. It was rather a singular coincidence. Along about four he would usually find himself wandering up that way. Strangely enough, at the same time, it was true that she had an irresistible impulse to go down and sit in the green ferns beside the same spring. They always seemed to be surprised to see one another. In reality, either of them would have been considerably more surprised had the other failed to put in an appearance. And always they had long talks, as the afternoon drew to twilight.

"But I don't think you ought to wait so late before starting home," the girl would always say. "You're not a human hawk, and it is easier to get lost than you think."

And this solicitude, Dan rightly figured, was a good sign. There was only one objection to it. It resulted in an unmistakable inference that she considered him unable to take care of himself—and that was the last thing on earth that he wanted her to think. He understood her well enough to know that her standards were the standards of the mountains, valuing strength and self-reliance above all things. He didn't stop to question why, every day, he trod so many weary miles to be with her.

She was as natural as a fawn; and many times she had quite taken away his breath. And once she did it literally. He didn't think that so long as death spared him he would ever be able to forget that experience. It was her birthday, and knowing of it in time he had arranged for the delivery of a certain package, dear to a girl's

heart, at her father's house. In the trying hour he had come trudging over the hills with it, and few experiences in his life had ever yielded such unmitigated pleasure as the sight of her, glowing white and red, as she took off its wrapping paper. It was a jolly old gift, he recollected—and when she had seen it, she fairly leaped at him. Her warm, round arms around his neck, and the softest, loveliest lips in the world pressed his. But in those days he didn't have the strength that he had now. He felt he could endure the same experience again with no embarrassment whatever. His first impression then, besides abounding, incredible astonishment, was that she had quite knocked out his breath. But let it be said for him that he recovered with notable promptness. His own arms had gone up and closed around her, and the girl had wriggled free.

"But you mustn't do that!" she told him.

"But, good Lord, girl! You did it to me! Is there no justice in women?"

"But I did it to thank you for this lovely gift. For remembering me—for being so good—and considerate. You haven't any cause to thank me."

He had many serious difficulties in thinking it out. And only one conclusion was obtainable—that Snowbird kissed as naturally as she did anything else, and the kiss meant exactly what she said it did and no more. But the fact remained that he would have walked a good many miles farther if he thought there was any possibility of a repeat.

But all at once his fantasies were suddenly and rudely dispelled by the intrusion of realities. Dan had been walking silently himself in the pine needles. As Lennox had wondered at



Dan Saw His Purpose.

long ago, he knew how by instinct; and instinctively he practiced this attainment as soon as he got out into the wild. The creature he had heard was fully one hundred yards distant, yet Dan could hear him with entire plainness. And for a while he couldn't even guess what manner of thing it might be.

A cougar that made so much noise would be immediately expelled from the union. A wolf pack, running by sight, might crack brush as freely; but a wolf pack would also bay to wake the dead. Of course it might be an elk or a steer, and still more likely, a bear. He stood still and listened. The sound grew nearer.

Soon it became evident that the creature was either walking with two legs, or else was a four-footed animal putting two feet down at the same instant. Dan had learned to wait. He stood perfectly still. And gradually he came to the conclusion that he was listening to the footfall of another man.

But it was rather hard to imagine what a man might be doing on this lonely hill. Of course it might be a

deer hunter; but few were the valley sportsmen who had penetrated to this far land. The footfall was much too heavy for Snowbird. The steps were evidently on another trail that intersected his own trail one hundred yards farther up the hill. He had only to stand still, and in an instant the man would come in sight.

He took one step into the thickets, prepared to conceal himself if it became necessary. Then he waited. Soon the man stepped out on the trail.

Even at the distance of one hundred yards, Dan had no difficulty whatever in recognizing him. He could not mistake this tall, dark form, the soiled, slouchy clothes, the rough hair, the intent, dark features. It was a man about his own age, his own height, but weighing fully twenty pounds more, and the dark, narrow eyes could belong to no one but Bert Cranston. He carried his rifle loosely in his arms.

He stopped at the forks in the trail and looked carefully in all directions. Dan had every reason to think that Cranston would see him at first glance. Only one clump of thickets sheltered him. But because Dan had learned the lesson of standing still, because his olive-drab sporting clothes blended softly with the colored leaves, Cranston did not detect him. He turned and strode on down the trail.

He didn't move quite like a man with innocent purposes. There was something stealthy, something sinister in his stride, and the way he kept such a sharp lookout in all directions. Yet he never glanced to the trail for deer tracks, as he would have done had he been hunting. Without even waiting to meditate on the matter, Dan started to shadow him.

Before one hundred yards had been traversed, he could better understand the joy the cougar takes in his hunting. It was the same process—a cautious, silent advance in the trail of prey. He had to walk with the same caution, he had to take advantage of the thickets. He began to feel a curious excitement.

Cranston seemed to be moving more carefully now, examining the brush along the trail. Now and then he glanced up at the tree tops. And all at once he stopped and knelt in the dry shrubbery.

At first all that Dan could see was the glitter of a knife blade. Cranston seemed to be whittling a piece of dead pine into fine shavings. Now he was gathering pine needles and small twigs, making a little pile of them. And then, just as Cranston drew his match, Dan saw his purpose.

Cranston was at his old trade—setting a forest fire. For two very good reasons, Dan didn't call to him at once. The two reasons were that Cranston had a rifle and that Dan was unarmed. It might be extremely likely that Cranston would choose the most plausible and effective means of preventing an interruption of his crime, and by the same token, prevent word of the crime ever reaching the authorities. The rifle contained five cartridges, and only one was needed.

But the idea of backing out, unseen, never even occurred to Dan. The fire would have a tremendous headway before he could summon help. Although it was near the lookout station, every condition pointed to a disastrous fire. The brush was dry as tinder, not so heavy as to choke the wind, but yet tall enough to carry the flame into the tree tops. The stiff breeze up the ridge would certainly carry the flame for miles through the parched Divide before help could come. In the meantime stock and lives and homes would be endangered, besides the irreparable loss of timber. There were many things that Dan might do, but giving up was not one of them.

After all, he did the wisest thing of all. He simply came out in plain sight and unconcernedly walked down the trail toward Cranston. At the same instant, the latter struck his match.

As Dan was no longer stalking, Cranston immediately heard his step. He whirled, recognized Dan, and for one long instant in which the world seemed to have time in plenty to make a complete revolution, he stood perfectly motionless. The match flared in his dark fingers, his eyes—full of singular conjecturing—rested on Dan's face. No instant of the latter's life had ever been fraught with greater

peril. He understood perfectly what was going on in Cranston's mind. The fire-brand was calmly deciding whether to shoot or whether to bluff it out. One required no more moral courage than the other. It really didn't make a great deal of difference to Cranston. But he decided that the bluffing was not worth the cartridge. The other course was too easy. He did not even dream that Dan had been shadowing him and had seen his intention. He would have laughed at the idea that a "tenderfoot" could thus walk behind him, unheard. Without concern, he scattered with his foot the little heap of kindling, and slipping his pipe into his mouth, he touched the flaring match to it. It was a wholly admirable little piece of acting, and would have deceived any one who had not seen his previous preparations. Then he walked on down the trail toward Dan.

Dan stopped and lighted his own pipe. It was a curious little trick. And then he leaned back against the great gray trunk of a fallen tree.

"Well, Cranston," he said civilly. The men had met on previous occasions, and always there had been the same invisible war between them.

"How do you do, Failing," Cranston replied. No perceptions could be so blunt as to miss the premeditated insult in the tone. He didn't speak in his own tongue at all, the short, guttural "Howdy" that is the greeting of the mountain men. He pronounced all the words with an exaggerated precision, an unmistakable mockery of Dan's own tone. In his accent he threw a tone of sickly sweetness, and his inference was all too plain. He was simply calling Failing a milksop and a white-liver; just as plainly as if he had used the words.

The eyes of the two men met. Cranston's lips were slightly curled in an unmistakable leer. Dan's were very straight. And in one thing at least, their eyes looked just the same. The pupils of both pairs had contracted to steel points, bright in the dark gray of the firs. Cranston's looked somewhat red; and Dan's were only hard and bright.

Snowbird to the rescue.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Island Women Are Financiers.

The Loo-Choo Islands, home of the world famous red lacquer ware, lie between Japan and Formosa, not far from China's coastwise routes. The ware tables, bowls, trays and boxes used daily throughout Japan and China, and sold to thousands of tourists, come principally from the little towns of Naha and Shuri. The trade in the ware is conducted by the women, who do all the merchandizing, and in fact have charge of it. They are strictly one-price merchants, the amount first asked for an article being the one at which it is finally sold no matter how much bargaining is done. The women are straight of back and erect of carriage, due to the custom of carrying everything on their heads. No matter what the weight or size of the object they place it on their head, and walk off seemingly giving no thought to balancing it.

Town Crier in France.

In the old days the town crier was a recognized institution throughout France. But when the art of printing came in the newspapers drove the town crier out of business. There are parts of France, however, where the town crier still makes his announcements, according to one of the members of A Company, Eighteenth engineers. In an obscure little village near the town where this unit was camped there is an old man who stands at the main street corner and beats a drum to attract the attention of the populace when there is news to be given out. There is no newspaper. When the armistice was signed the people of that village learned of it from the crier.—The Spiker, France.

True.

"Riches have wings."
"They've to nowadays to get any where near the cost of living."

CLOUDS ARE EARTH'S VEIL

If Seen From the Moon They Would Appear as Mere Film Separating the Earth.

The layer of cloud covering the earth is relatively very thin. If, for example, we could examine the earth from the moon we would doubtless see a veil of cloud covering little more than half the surface. At that distance the clouds would have no texture, the earth would appear swathed in an irregular sheet of formless vapor, through which, from time to time, the land and water areas could be seen.

The cloud cover of the earth is most attenuated; it may be compared to a film, for it is supposed to be less than one-eight-hundredth of the earth's diameter in vertical thickness.

The thinness of the earth's atmos-

phere may be more clearly comprehended if we realize that the relative thickness of the cloud layer on an eight-inch terrestrial globe would be about one-hundredth of an inch. Yet it is in this thin belt that clouds form, so that it is seen our weather is produced within limited confines.—The Ace.

Dignity of Peruvian Mayor.

The mayor of the smallest town in Peru feels that it is incumbent on him in order to make the proper display of official dignity, to be accompanied by a band of pipers whenever he appears on any state occasion. These musicians have instruments which consist of a series of reeds strung together and make weird music.

One-half of the world imagines the other half couldn't possibly manage to worry along without it.

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